



Original Article

Biodiversity Conservation Based on Cultural and Religious Values

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Abstract

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Biodiversity conservation is important for maintaining stable ecosystems, ensuring a sustainable supply of food and water, regulating the climate, and providing medicinal resources. It also has economic, social, and cultural benefits, such as supporting tourism and providing aesthetic value, while also serving as an ethical responsibility to preserve life for future generations. The people are not familiar with the thousands of economic plant species in their ecosystems, but tribal people have good knowledge of religious and cultural value of biodiversity and many plants have been conserved in their natural habitats through their deep knowledge of beliefs, faith. Biodiversity also conserved by different strategies and methods which is useful for future generation.

Keywords- Biocultural conservation, Sacred groves, Witchcraft. In-situ, Ex-situ

Introduction

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth, from the smallest microbes to the largest animals and plants. It provides us everything we need to survive like food, medicine, clean air, and a stable climate. But human activities like cutting down forests, pollution, and climate change are responsible for disturbing this balance so biodiversity conservation plays an important role to maintain quality of life of all living organisms. India is known as a land of celebrations, fairs and festivals, crowded ceremonies, dancing and other social leisure activities. There is a great variety of ethnic groups and communities with their beliefs, languages and culture. The contribution of Indian culture and science to the world by significant innovations in astronomy and herbalism. Traditional system of medical practices and conservation of biodiversity through traditional ceremonial and religious functions are the most valuable and precious gifts of the Indians to the humanity. Our ancestor has a unique and rich cultural heritage; there are some rituals in which number of individual plant or any specific patch in the forest protected and used as a tool to communicate with souls and God. The phenomenon of conservation of sacred groves is as old as civilization in which a group of plant or individual plants are protected by the local communities. India has four major biodiversity hotspots the Himalayas, the Indo-Burma region, the Western Ghats, and Sunderland. These areas are recognized for having a high number of endemic species. The plant species saved from centuries by primitive people for their use in variety of rituals, ceremonies, in this paper we will study the biodiversity conservation and their methods of conservation, its cultural values. India, protecting and promoting biodiversity has always been an integral part of culture and civilization. This can be seen in the thousands of sacred groves that are found all over the country. The Indian traditional systems of agriculture and medicine depend on plant and animal biodiversity. India has already been having legal provisions dealing with biodiversity. Indian Forest Act 1927 and Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 deal with management of forests and conservation of forest land respectively.



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Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 is for the protection of wild animals, birds and plants, and basically aims at protecting, propagating or developing wildlife or its environment through national parks, sanctuaries

What is Conservation of Biodiversity?

Conservation of Biodiversity is the act of protecting different type's plants, animals, insects, and even small microorganisms on Earth. There are different methods of conservation by focusing on following practices.

1. Preventing the cutting of trees.
2. Putting a ban on hunting of animals.
3. Efficient utilisation of natural resources.
4. Protected areas should be developed for animals where no human activities are allowed.

Types of conservation methods:

1. In-situ conservation

Protecting organism species within their natural habitat. There is less competition for food, water and space among the organisms.

Examples: National parks, wildlife sanctuaries, biosphere reserves, and sacred groves.

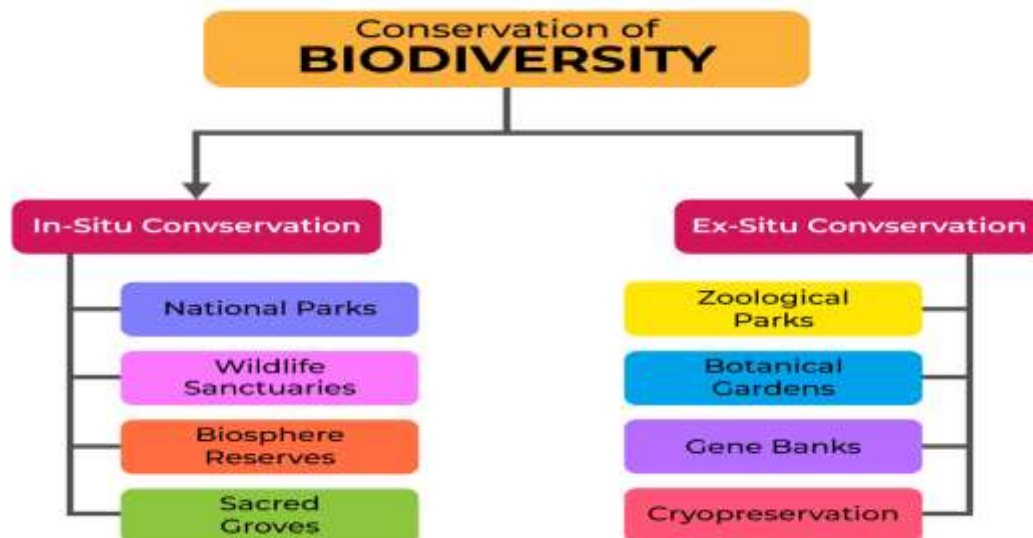
2. Ex-situ conservation:

Protecting species outside of their natural habitat. The animals are provided with a longer time breeding activity.

Examples: Zoos, botanical gardens, gene banks, and cryo preservation of gametes.

3. Sacred groves:

Areas considered sacred by local communities. They protect rare, threatened, and endemic species because deforestation is prohibited in these areas Biodiversity has significant cultural value because it provides inspirational, spiritual, and educational needs, and is deeply linked to cultural identity.



Cultural and spiritual value

1. **Identity:** Biodiversity often shows cultural identity, providing information about place and history.
2. **Inspiration:** Natural landscapes and organisms provide inspiration for artist, musician across different cultures.
3. **Spirituality:** Many cultures have spiritual beliefs and practices related to specific species plant & Animal or natural areas, viewing them as sacred.
4. **Education:** Biological diversity provides opportunities for formal and informal education, helping people to learn about the natural world and their place in it.

Biocultural conservation

1. Integration

Biocultural conservation prove that biological and cultural diversity are not separate but they are linked and should be conserved together.

2. Participatory approach

It involves local communities and stakeholders in conservation to take efforts by using their knowledge and perspectives to develop effective strategies.

3. Cultural keystone species



Some species are considered "cultural keystone species" because they represent community's culture, identity, traditions, and well-being. So that making their conservation important for both ecological and cultural reasons.

4. **Holistic approach**

This integrated approach considers the well-being of both humans and other living beings, and aims to balance conservation goals with human needs.

Cultural values and biodiversity

1. **Sacred sites:** Many cultures protect areas like sacred forests for religious or spiritual reasons, which serves as a conservation method.
2. **Traditional knowledge:** local communities have knowledge about ecosystems, species, and sustainable practices (like crop rotation and water conservation) that can inform modern conservation efforts.
3. **Community-based conservation:** The participation of marginalized communities including indigenous peoples are play crucial role in effective conservation.

Ethical considerations

Beyond exploitation: Biodiversity is not resource to be exploited. Species have intrinsic value and should be preserved for future generations.

Sustainability: Integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation is essential for building ecosystems and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Strategies for Biodiversity Conservation

Following are the important strategies for biodiversity conservation:

1. All the varieties of food, timber plants, livestock, microbes and agricultural animals should be conserved.
2. All the economically important organisms should be identified and conserved.
3. Unique ecosystems should be preserved first.
4. The resources should be utilized efficiently.
5. Poaching and hunting of wild animals should be prevented.
6. The reserves and protected areas should be developed carefully.
7. The levels of pollutants should be reduced in the environment.

Plants which have Cultural values

Magical Herbalism (Witchcraft)

Thousands of years ago magical plants are used with their cultural values. Since today we used these plants for food, shelter, clothing, weapons, and even healing. Witchcraft (magic) can be roughly defined as the power of a person to do harm. Some plants used by which for different beliefs are given below

1. **Smilax spp.** – Mix this spp. with cinnamon and sandalwood powder and sprinkle around the premises to bring money.
2. **Bamboo Briar. (Syzygium aromaticum)**- Flowers add to the bath water to aid in financial dealings.
3. **Taraxacum officinalis**- Fruits are hang over the door for protection from theft. The fruits powder is used as incense.
4. **Altheaea officinalis** - Flowers Place in a glass bowl for a magical natural pot.
5. **Valeriana officinalis**- Root Cut Known as a 'Herbs. A cleansing herb can be used to cleanse a space before doing magical workings. Purifying use in purification bath.

Cnicus arvensis (Blessed Thistle) - Use in all works of protection and blessing.

Psychoactive plants used in tantra

The term "tantra" refers to a great many religious practices and beliefs.

1. **Datura (Dhatoora):** - In Buddhist Tantra Both Datura stramonium and Datura metel are used.
2. **Cannabis (marijuana):** - In Buddhist Tantra Like datura, Cannabis is referred to in the Vedas as "source of happiness.
3. **Ganja:** - It is prepared from resin-rich flowers and specially breed high yielding strains it is usually smoked.
4. **Charas:** - It consists of pure resin from these special strains and is also smoked.

Conserving plants through Vastu Shastra

Vastu Shastra being an ancient science deals with position of different rooms in residential buildings, factories and industries. Vastu can be applied on flowers and plants in the house. The plants play significant role in activating positive energy to our day-to-day life. Here, what Vastu says about plants is discussed.

1. **Ocimum tenuifolium (Tulsi):** Should be planted in North, East or North-east and in the front of house.
2. **Ficus religiosa (Pippal):** Should be planted near the temple or any other sacred places.
3. **Ficus benghalensis (Vat):** Should be planted near the temple or any other sacred places.
4. **Epipremnum aureum (Money plant):** May be planted inside the room as it gives good luck to house.
5. **Big tree:** Should be planted in South and West direction of house and should not planted in front
6. **Small tree:** It should be planted in North and East direction of house and should not be planted in North-east corner.



7. **Spiny plant:** It should be planted in open area and should not be planted in the house because it produces bad energy.
8. **Rock garden:** It should be planted In South-west direction and should not be in North-east direction
9. **Creepers:** It should be planted near the entrance door and southern wall of house.
10. **Milky plants:** Avoid plantation in the house as it may affect the health of family.

Conclusion

Cultural values in biodiversity conservation include spiritual, aesthetic, and educational benefits that are integral to cultural identity and human well-being. These values are seen in practices like the protection of sacred groves, the use of plants in cultural ceremonies and traditional medicine, and the deep spiritual connection indigenous communities have with their environment. Recognizing these values is for effective conservation, which involves empowering local communities and integrating traditional knowledge into modern management plans. Tribal people have contributed a significant role in conservation of the biodiversity, environmental management and development process in and around localities of their natural habitat. However, due to over-exploitation of natural resources and destruction of natural forest many important plants species are becoming rare and critically endangered and some of them are even extinct. It is estimated that 10% of all species are currently endangered in India (Pandey et al., 2005). These extinctions are Irreversible so they will impact on well-being of human. Our ancestors had left various religious beliefs for us towards nature and it was a very constructive device for conservation of plant biodiversity not only during their time but at present also. Today, ethnobotany has become important and crucial area of research and development in resources Management, conservation of biodiversity at genetic, Species and ecosystem levels, and socio-economic development of the region. Thus, the indigenous people have managed and conserved the biodiversity of their localities.

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